

Images of Women in Hispanic Culture

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Edited by

Teresa Fernández Ulloa
and Joanne Schmidt Morazzani

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FOREWORD

This book studies the ways the traditional polarized images of women have been used and challenged in the Hispanic world, especially during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, but also in previous times, by writers and the media. Different chapters will analyze the image of women in specific political periods such as Francoism or the Kirchners' administration, stereotypes of women in films in Mexico and Chile, and the representation of women in textbooks, among other topics. We will also see how two women writers, in the 17th and the 19th centuries, viewed the role of women in their society.

This book is formed mainly by the papers presented at the *Fourth International Symposium on Ideology, Politics and Demands in Spanish Language, Literature and Film*, online, March 20-22, 2014. The papers underwent a double blind peer review process before their acceptance to be published. Our scientific committee is formed by the following members:

- Dr. Teresa Fernández-Ulloa, California State University-Bakersfield, USA.
- Dr. Raciél Damón Martínez Gómez, Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural, Mexico.
- Dr. Rita De Cássia Miranda Diogo, Instituto de Letras, Departamento de Letras Neolatinas, Universidade do Estado do Río de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Dr. Txetxu Aguado, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA.
- Dr. Antonio Miguel Bañón Hernández, Departamento de Filología, Universidad de Almería, Spain.
- Dr. Talita de Assis Barreto, Universidade do Estado do Río de Janeiro / Universidade Federal Fluminense / Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Río de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Dr. Ana Cristina dos Santos, Universidad do Estado do Río de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Dr. Mohamed El-Madkouri Maataqui, Departamento de Lingüística, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain.
- Dr. Elda Firmo Braga, Instituto de Letras, Departamento de Letras Neolatinas, Universidade do Estado do Río de Janeiro, Brazil.

- Dr. Erin Hogan, Department of Modern Languages, Linguistics and Intercultural Communication, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, USA.
- Dr. Charo Lacalle Zalduendo, Departamento de Periodismo y Ciencias de la Comunicación, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.
- Dr. Nereida López Vidales, Dpto. de Historia Moderna, Contemporánea y de América, Periodismo y Comunicación Audiovisual, Universidad de Valladolid, Spain.
- Dr. Annabel Martín, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA.
- Dr. Inmaculada Pertusa Seva, Department of Modern Languages, Western Kentucky University, USA.
- Dr. Rosario Portillo Mayorga, Departamento de Filología, Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain.
- Dr. Rocío Quispe-Agnoli, Department of Romance and Classical Studies, Michigan State University, USA.
- Dr. Hernán Urrutia Cárdenas, Departamento de Filología Hispánica, Románica y Teoría de la Literatura, Universidad del País Vasco, Leioa, Bizkaia, Spain.

CHAPTER ONE

DEVOTION AND THE ROLES OF WOMEN (WIFE AND MUN) IN TWO PLAYS BY ÁNGELA DE AZEVEDO (17TH CENTURY)

TERESA FERNÁNDEZ ULLOA

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, BAKERSFIELD

MARÍA DILLINGHAM

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, BAKERSFIELD

MIGUEL SOLER GALLO

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

1. Introduction

Spain's Golden Age was a period marked by astonishing events that manifested themselves in the arenas of literature, music and art, extending from the early 16th century to the late 17th century. During the 17th century, the Baroque period, the works that exemplified a more secular perspective on Spanish life were those created by the talented and highly regarded Spanish dramatist Lope de Vega (1562-1635); hence, he introduced the *comedia nueva*¹ to the world of theater. "His *Arte nuevo de escribir comedias en este tiempo*, which he read before an audience of Madrid's literati in 1609, represented a spirited defense of his practice as a playwright, and offered a blueprint for others to follow" (Pym 32). In the literary canon of prose, Lope de Vega's contemporary Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1661) triumphed as Spain's most prolific novelist; the most classical and preeminently regarded novel of Spain was

¹ The *comedia nueva* was an authentic creation of playwright discourse by Lope de Vega that abandoned the more classical approach of its epoch and "should allow for a mixture of the comic and the tragic" (Pym 32).

Cervantes' 1605 piece - *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*².

There is no doubt that 17th century Spain enjoyed an array of talent delivered by strong male literary figures, talent that was clearly exhibited in writings of many forms (poetry, plays and novels) and on the Golden Age stage; however, there is little to be said about the female literary figures of the 17th century Spanish Golden Age period. Female dramatists from the Baroque period are scarce, as Teresa Ferrer Valls (2006: 2) explains:

“There are actually, we need to say, very few surviving works of women playwrights, and they are substantially linked to the names of Ana Caro de Mallén, María de Zayas, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva, Feliciano Enríquez de Guzmán, Ángela de Acevedo or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. It should be added that, among them, as in the case of Leonor de la Cueva and María de Zayas, only a comedy is preserved. As a result, the panorama of texts that we have, as shown, is scarce.”³

Thus, it is important to emphasize, as Ferrer Valls does, that although there are references and tangible mentions of these female dramatists in our contemporary times, and a heightened awareness of their existence, there is a scarcity of texts by these playwrights on this panoramic list. Women were not considered eligible participants within the social and cultural realm of the Baroque period. Moreover, traditional studies of this period definitely delineate the participation of women as marginal contributors.

Teresa Scott Soufas explores and examines the marginalized female playwrights in a male-dominated canon of theatrical arts in her book *Dramas of Distinction: Plays by Golden Age Women*; however, she eloquently explains that the aim of her volume is not to compare the works of male and female dramatists in relation to gender-specific ideologies and conjectures, but moreover, is to extend the appreciation that exists for the works of five extraordinary female dramatists: Ángela de Acevedo (or Azevedo), Ana Caro Mallén de Soto, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva,

² Miguel de Cervantes wrote a second part to this brilliant novel a decade later (1615) titled *El ingenioso caballero don Quijote de la Mancha*.

³ “En realidad, hay que advertirlo ya, son muy pocas las obras conservadas de autoras dramáticas, y se vinculan sustancialmente a los nombres de Ana Caro de Mallén, María de Zayas, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva, Feliciano Enríquez de Guzmán, Ángela de Acevedo o sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Hay que añadir que, de alguna de ellas, como es el caso de Leonor de la Cueva o María de Zayas, tan solo se conserva una comedia. De manera que el panorama de textos con el que contamos es, como puede verse, escaso.”

Feliciana Enríquez de Guzmán, and María de Zayas y Sotomayor (1). “These women’s plays are products of the period beginning as early as 1628 to perhaps as late as the 1660s, the majority having been composed (and staged, if at all) during the 1630s and 1640s (*Dramas of Distinction* 1)”.

The aim of this article is to present the beguiling work of the underrepresented dramatist Ángela de Acevedo⁴, with a lens that depicts an analysis parallel to the ideologies of devotion during the 17th century’s religious alignment with Catholicism, and also simultaneously to unravel other themes and concepts associated with the historical period known as Baroque.

Acevedo was born in Lisbon, Portugal, “probably in the first years of the seventeenth century, to Juan de Acevedo Pereira and his second wife, Isabel de Oliveira, a couple connected with courtly life” (*Women’s Acts* 1). Later in her young life, the family moved to Madrid, Spain, to serve Queen Isabel de Borbón in Philip IV’s court; henceforth, “she enjoyed the advantages of court sponsorship and perhaps its more elaborate staging opportunities” (*Women’s Acts* 1). Acevedo wrote three plays (*Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen*, *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*, and *El muerto disimulado*), but there is no information regarding any representation of them in the popular theater, so, if they were represented, it would have been for private, royal audiences. All of Acevedo’s plays are *comedias*⁵ that truly epitomize the leitmotifs associated with this famous style of playwriting. We will analyze, in the first two plays⁶, how devotion is represented through divine characters, and to what extent these plays participate in the indoctrination typical of the Saints’ plays, by looking at topics such as the *contemptus mundi*, the praise of the convent and the dialogues with God. Also, we examine how Acevedo portrays the roles of women in the 17th century: as wife or nun. Prior to the discussion of the themes that will be explored in the works of two of Ángela de Acevedo’s plays, it is pertinent to briefly provide an

⁴ Teresa Scott Soufas asserts that “the palace must have provided Azevedo with ample exposure to literary and artistic peers with whom she participated in the world of arts and letters and of which the Habsburg monarch was a famed patron” (1997: 1).

⁵ Lope de Vega greatly influenced this style of playwright during the 17th century; *comedias* are three-part plays (Jornada primera, Jornada segunda, Jornada tercera) that combine comic and dramatic (i.e., themes of love, marriage and religion) elements.

⁶ *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen* and *margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*.

explanation of the situation of women in Spain in the 17th century, and a synopsis of each drama.

2. To Give Birth or to Pray: The Situation of Women in Spain in the 17th Century

The situation of women in Spain during the 17th century could well be defined as a history of silence; a silence that came from previous years, but in this century was perhaps worsened by the emergence of a series of treatises from the Catholic Church which invariably looked askance at women, considering them a live source of sin and devastation for men. However, as usual, whenever the past is investigated in depth, and through a non-ideologized lens, we can find isolated testimonies of women who obtained certain types of representation in the society and culture of that time; always in infinite disproportion when compared with men. That is why their voices have not been rescued or have not been properly analyzed to date, since those productions were merely anecdotal and of little or no quality, as judged by several researchers who have preceded us. These valuations show the arbitrariness that characterizes what is known as a literary canon, which, little by little, thanks to the emergence of more or less recent studies, has been challenged with the discovery and reestablishment of these women's voices. They aim to demonstrate that those women possessed the same literary quality as their male peers, because their creations were made following the common artistic trends of their time; but since they were women, they were ostracized. This is the case of some writers in the 17th century in Spain, who primarily wrote plays: Feliciano Enríquez de Guzmán, Ana Caro de Mallén, María de Zayas y Sotomayor, Leonor de la Cueva y Silva, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Ángela de Acevedo. There is also the known case, in the field of sculpture, of a woman who stood and went through any limit imposed on her alleged ability to do manual work: Luisa Ignacia Roldán Villavicencio, "La Roldana," the first documented female Spanish sculptor.

In dealing with the 17th century in Spain, we need to talk about two basic aspects that influenced the concept of the woman: firstly, misogyny as a general feeling in society on all levels, and secondly, a doctrine that radiated from various sectors following the Counter-Reformation, which did nothing but encourage the rejection of women. The general idea was that all women were a direct descendant of Eve, the disobedient woman of Genesis who tried the forbidden fruit and brought all evil to humanity, and snatched eternal life from the first man, Adam. Woman represents sin, excluding only the Virgin Mary, born immaculate, and who became the

female supreme model. This is a second chance that the Church offers women, who are deemed unstable and imperfect beings, to carry out an exemplary life, according to certain limits that morals imposed. The Virgin Mary embodies the values of kindness, sacrifice and selflessness in every aspect of life, especially in times of difficulty.

Nobody was safe from sin in those years of fear of God; that is how the Counter-Reformation wanted man to contemplate divinity, with an atavistic fear of everything that meant destruction of the soul and corruption of the body that would lead him inevitably to Hell:

“In the context of a crisis that was harder for being less expected, that hit men with spiritual terrors and led them to the moral suffering of hopelessness, religion was transformed, by force of necessity of hope, in a wonderful instrument that uprooted men from the soil and led them to the illusion of a miraculous living. [...] These forms of religiosity, already exacerbated, were taken to the limit by the Counter-Reformation’s didactic action and the emotional methods it used”⁷ (1988: 456-547).

Woman is the first door to that spiral of destruction, as a daughter of Eve, a diabolical creature. So we are witnessing a period of extreme vigilance against the woman, to ensure at all times that she is properly maintained, locked away and isolated from society. In this regard, Sánchez Lora defines the concept of the woman at that time as follows:

“The patristic thought on women, the basis of the texts from theologians, philosophers, scientists, priests and so on, formed and sustained the idea they had of the feminine nature, and threaded, in one form or another, throughout the Middle Ages in Europe. However, such thinking, when passing to modernity, had changes, not of essence, but of complexity due to all the Renaissance humanist influence. It went from seeing the woman not only as an instrument of the devil to drag the man to sin, but also as a factor of social dissolution”⁸ (1988: 40-41).

⁷ “En el marco de una crisis que fue más dura por menos esperada, que golpeó a los hombres con terrores espirituales y les condujo al sufrimiento moral de la desesperanza, la religiosidad fue transformada, a fuerza de necesidad de esperanza, en instrumento maravilloso que arrancó a los hombres del suelo y les condujo a la ilusión del vivir milagroso. [...] Estas formas de religiosidad, ya exacerbadas, fueron llevadas al límite por la acción didáctica de la Contrarreforma y por los métodos emocionales que utilizó” (1988: 456-547).

⁸ “El pensamiento patristico sobre la mujer, base de los textos de teólogos, filósofos, científicos, sacerdotes, etc., conformó y sustentó la idea que se tenía de la naturaleza femenina y atravesó, de una u otra forma, toda la Edad Media en Europa. No obstante, dicho pensamiento al pasar a la modernidad tuvo cambios, no

Outraged honor was the lever that activated the mechanism by which a family was doomed to rejection and, therefore, lost their status in society. Honor was considered the supreme good of a family. The essayist José Antonio Maravall indicated that honor became, in the 17th century, a social manifestation (1979: 68), and he defined it as “the prize to respond, promptly, to what is required by what a person is socially”⁹ (1979: 33). Normally, the person who threatened the honor of a family was the woman, whose chicanery could trick a married man, or who could be the one put to shame, for example, by being raped. In both cases, family honor was stained, and fame, an eminently medieval concept, was compromised; and the situation was extremely serious if it was a young man who received the grievance. The result was public outrage, a social disqualification that was settled in different ways: with silence, or by verbally agreeing to a marriage with the one who committed the action, or with death. If that could not be remedied, and the woman became pregnant and decided to have the baby, the creature used to be abandoned, the *expósito*/foundling, and the whole process was carried out with the utmost discretion and secrecy.

The woman—mother, sister, daughter or wife— became therefore, a sanctuary upon which honor rested, and the man—father, brother, son or husband—the one who had to monitor it to avoid its profanation. As Maravall points out, it is the man who takes responsibility for the social organization to be respected and fulfilled. “As the defense of masculinity belongs to the integrator program of society, that corresponds to honor, he is the one who defends the honor, according to current male conception, of the wife, sister, mother, daughter”¹⁰ (1979: 67). This idea of honor, which was one of the obsessive themes of Baroque theater, for example, in the works of Ángela de Acevedo analyzed here, was just an example of the misogyny of the 17th century. It is not only typical in that century, but it is in that historical and social context that we can perceive a tightening of this tradition to take care of female honesty, that was nothing more than a way to ensure the good name and image of the man (Burbano Arias, 2006: 21).

de esencia, pero sí de complejidad por toda la influencia humanista renacentista. Se pasó de ver a la mujer no solo como un instrumento del demonio para arrastrar al hombre al pecado, sino también, como factor de disolución social” (1988: 40-41).

⁹ “el premio de responder, puntualmente, a lo que se está obligado por lo que socialmente se es.”

¹⁰ “Como la defensa de la masculinidad pertenece al programa integrador de la sociedad que corresponde al honor, el que defiende la honra, según la concepción masculina vigente, de la esposa, de la hermana, de la madre, de la hija” (1979: 67).

The role of both sexes in the stratified society of the 17th century was perfectly defined, and each individual knew what his role was, and how he should act. In the words of Sánchez Lora:

“As a reaction to the general crisis of the seventeenth century, which shook the foundations underpinning the stratified society, there was a hardening of the ideological and hierarchical codes. With this tightening the intent was to affix to each individual the strict compliance of his class functions, to which they are linked by birth. A woman took responsibility for nothing less than to ensure and guarantee that every class link is legitimate, that each one is who he says he is, and a son of who he seems to be, hence there is no more legitimate garment than her honesty”¹¹ (1988: 456).

The honesty of women was essential to maintain social order and to ensure that all class links were legitimate, but it is crucial to note that honesty could not exist without chastity, that is, without the woman being kept pure, or, at least, faithful to her husband. As we can see, the woman was considered an abnormal being since her “free will,” which in any case had to be guarded, and her actions affected the man’s honor, his most precious gift, and by extension, the whole family’s honor. These functions should not remain forgotten, for many treatises reminding women of the role they should play in society were published, as were collections of exemplary lives of righteous women or saints, who were presented as role models, with their religiosity standing out above all. There were also plays that reflected the situation of the woman, however it was the book *La perfecta casada/The Perfect Wife* (1583), by Fray Luis de León, that laid the foundation for what was to be the life of a married Catholic woman. What is surprising and significant is that his thoughts were in force in Spanish society, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the historical period, until the arrival of democracy in 1978. This author is the one who defined silence as the best partner and ally of women:

“It is fair that all pride themselves on silence, those to whom it suits to cover up their little knowledge, as well as those who can shamelessly

¹¹ “Como reacción a la crisis general del siglo XVII, que sacudió las bases que sustentaban la sociedad estamental, se produjo un endurecimiento ideológico y de los códigos jerárquicos. En este endurecimiento se pretendió fijar a cada individuo el cumplimiento estricto de sus funciones estamentales, a las cuales se les vincula por medio del nacimiento. A la mujer le correspondió, nada menos, el papel de asegurar y garantizar que toda vinculación estamental es legítima, que cada uno es quien dice ser e hijo de quien parece ser de ahí que no exista prenda más legítima que su honestidad” (1988: 456).

discover what they know; because in all it is not only a pleasant condition, but also a due virtue, to be silent and say little. [...] Because as nature, as we said and will say, made women to be locked and keep the house, in the same way it forces them to shut their mouths”¹² (1950: 239).

Therefore, as expressed by Presentación Pereiro, the woman was responsible, with her silent attitude, for creating a private space for her husband, while he had to grow in the public sphere (1987: 60). The Spanish writer Mercedes Formica described the state of the woman at the time: “The woman was under the tutelage of the man of the family. Father, brother, uncle, husband. Very few lived unmarried, i.e., loose. Hence the concern to make them “take a status.” Married status, or religious status, means to be subjected to the husband or to the Provincial of their community’s order”¹³ (1973: 76).

Few women remained single, that is, without taking a status; some exceptions could be those who stayed at home taking care of their elderly parents, or those who came from good families, mainly relatives of the nobility, who were destined to be a maid of the queen in court. Meanwhile, widowed mothers preferred to live as “*recogidas/the collected*” taken into the homes of married daughters, or in monasteries of category, as “*señoras de piso/apartment ladies*”¹⁴ (Formica: 1973: 76-77).¹⁵

As well as the home, the monastery became a residence for women; to

¹² “Es justo que se precien de callar todas, así aquellas a las que les conviene encubrir su poco saber, como aquellas que pueden sin vergüenza descubrir lo que saben; porque en todas es, no sólo condición agradable, sino virtud debida, el silencio y el hablar poco. [...] Porque así como la naturaleza, como dijimos y diremos, hizo a las mujeres para que encerradas guardasen la casa, así las obliga a que cerrasen la boca” (1950: 239).

¹³ “La mujer estaba sometida a la tutela del varón de la familia. Padre, hermano, tío, marido. Muy pocas vivieron solteras, es decir, sueltas. De ahí la preocupación de hacerlas “toma estado”. Estado de casada, o estado religioso, medios de sujetarlas al marido o al Provincial de la Orden de su comunidad” (1973: 76).

¹⁴ This was the name given to the ladies, usually widows, who were accepted into the enclosed convent, but did not participate fully in the community life, because they were in a special regime, as pensioners. Most of these women were relatives of the nuns.

¹⁵ “Pocas fueron las mujeres que permanecieron solteras, es decir, sin tomar estado, algunas excepciones podían ser las que se quedaron en sus hogares cuidando a sus progenitores ancianos o aquellas que provenían de buenas familias, fundamentalmente emparentadas con la nobleza, que eran destinadas a ejercer como dama de la reina en la corte. Por su parte, las madres viudas preferían vivir como ‘recogidas’ en las viviendas de las hijas casadas, o en monasterios de categoría, en calidad de ‘señoras de piso’ ” (Formica: 1973: 76-77).

have a daughter who decided to devote her life to God gave the family a good reputation. However, there were nuns who professed to join religious orders, not because of having the required faith to do so, but as an escape to exercise their intelligence and creative potential, since other social spheres were forbidden to them. Except for these nuns, who did receive some instruction in convents and who wrote books demonstrating their skill or artistic ability, women were usually illiterate and only received a small dose of knowledge related to domestic work, so they could exercise their functions and transmit them, perpetuating their social immobility. It was believed that, for the woman, the development of the intellect was of no use, since she was an inferior being from a biological point of view, although we can find the words of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in the letter known as *Respuesta a sor Filotea/Response to Sor Filotea* (1691), considered one of the first feminist testimonies of our culture: “I do not study to write, much less to teach (that would be excessive pride of myself), but only to see if by studying I ignore less”¹⁶ (2004: 30). Furthermore, in those years, the fact that women were uneducated was well considered, and gave them a favorable image in society’s view, for a particular reason that is often not properly noted and that we will discuss now.

The 16th and 17th centuries were defined by Américo Castro (1961) as “the troubled age/*la edad conflictiva*,” where the Catholic Church made a special effort in taking care of the families’ genealogies, above all, to discover if the ancestors were “old Christians,” that is, pure Christians; or “new ones,” converted Jews. In this sense, one of the first indications that a suspect was of Jewish origin was intelligence and love of culture. Miguel de Cervantes, in the interlude *La elección de los alcaldes de Daganzo/The election of the mayors of Daganzo* (1615) refers to this issue through the character called Humillos, who says the following about those who can read, which was considered the first step in culture: “They can learn those chimeras, / That lead men into the brazier, / And women to the humble house”¹⁷ (Cervantes, 1997: 108). With these words, he warned of the danger of instruction in that society, because it was something that identified Jews, and that could lead a man to the bonfire and a woman to the brothel. Francisco de Quevedo, in *Libro de todas las cosas/The book of all things* (1631), confirms somehow the words of Cervantes’ character

¹⁶ “Yo no estudio para escribir, ni menos para enseñar (que fuera en mí desmedida soberbia), sino solo por ver si con estudiar ignoro menos” (2004: 30).

¹⁷ The humble house (*casa llana*) was the brothel. See Cervantes (1997: 108). Original: “Que se pongan a aprender esas quimeras, / Que llevan a los hombres al brasero, / Y a las mujeres a la casa llana.”

when he recommends the following: “To be a knight or nobleman, even if you are Jewish or Moorish, make bad handwriting, speak slowly and tough, ride a horse, owe much, and go where nobody knows you, and you will be”¹⁸ (Quevedo: 1966: 115).

Clearly, the attachment to the land and ignorance were symbols of the old Christians, while wisdom and knowledge of various disciplines was typical of the new Christians; but why did intelligence lead women to the brothel? It seems that Sephardic women’s capacity to love was well-known in society. If, apart from that, she was well educated, the combination of intellectual knowledge and conditions for erotic play produced, in public opinion, the following statement, gathered by Mercedes Formica: “the attractive and cultured woman is equal to the Jewish woman. Sooner or later, she will end up in bed with a celebrity”¹⁹ (1979: 130). The writer gives the following judgment on a Christian woman:

“The temperament of the Christian woman was quiet, submissive, seeking refuge in monasteries, and her interest in culture was nil or very weakly expressed. To have it meant a spotted breed, a “fishy smell,”²⁰ a fixed expression alluding to the terrible sentences of the Inquisition.

What could happen was so serious that the apparent disregard for the intellectual in the sector of Spanish women, perhaps was motivated by the fear of being branded as converses”²¹ (1979: 131).

Being aware of this situation, we can understand the reasons behind seeing so few artistic female testimonies, yet we should celebrate them, and dedicate a thorough study to try to put them in their rightful place, in our case, in literary historiography, which has always been unfair to women’s creations. The existing or surviving works, like those of Ángela

¹⁸ “Para ser caballero o hidalgo, aunque seas judío o moro, haz mala letra, habla despacio y recio, anda a caballo, debe mucho y vete donde no te conozcan, y lo serás”.

¹⁹ “Mujer atractiva y culta, igual a mujer judía. Tarde o temprano, acabará en la cama de un personaje”.

²⁰ The original expression in Spanish “oler a chamusquina,” has as one of its meanings “to be dangerous in relation to faith.” “Chamusquina” is the action and effect of “chamuscarse,” meaning “to burn, to singe” (www.rae.es).

²¹ “El temperamento de la cristiana, sosegado, sumiso, buscó refugio en los monasterios y su interés por la cultura fue nulo o se manifestó muy débilmente. Tenerlo significaba casta manchada, “oler a chamusquina”, frase hecha alusiva a las terribles penas del Santo Oficio.

Lo que podía suceder era tan grave, que la manifiesta indiferencia hacia lo intelectual, de este sector de españolas, quizá la motivó el miedo a ser tachadas de conversas” (1979: 131).

de Acevedo, show that women had, like men, those artistic tendencies that proliferated in 17th century theater: swashbuckling comedy, the use of hagiographic elements, and the drama of honor.

3. Synopses of *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción* and *La margarita de Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*

*Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen*²², is a play written by Acevedo that takes place in “Oporto, Portugal” (*Women’s Acts* 1); it entails a dichotomy of beliefs, as the title depicts, and the ramifications of gambling and devotion to the Virgin Mary (mother of Jesus Christ). In this dramatic piece, two siblings, Felisardo and María, who are at a disadvantage due to their penurious situation, seem hopeless when facing the aspirations of marriage; during this time period it was customary for the husband to offer financial security to his future wife and a tradition for the wife to offer some sort of dowry to her husband’s family. Because of the siblings’ inability to offer a financial gain or contribution to their respective wife or husband, life takes an interesting turn for the characters. Felisardo decides to enter into a gambling match with Don Fadrique de Miranda, a wealthy gentleman, in an attempt to regain the wealth that came from inherited nobility; however, he loses the last hand and is tempted by the devil. It is inexorably, Felisardo and María’s devotion to the Virgin Mary that aids them in the victorious defeat of the devil’s attempt to overtake Felisardo’s soul.

Acevedo’s second play, *La margarita de Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*,²³ is based on “the dramatization of the story of Saint Irene (or Santa Iria), a tale famous in the hagiography of Portugal” (*Women’s Acts* 2). The reader learns of the intricacies that were part of the life of Saint Irene. The amorous pursuits that are maintained in the legend come to life in Acevedo’s play. Gascón contends, in his book *The Woman Saint in Spanish Golden Age Drama*, that Acevedo maintains the same plotline; however, the writer makes significant changes in her dramatization of the legend (84). In this play, the drama unfolds as Britaldo, a newly married nobleman, decides to carelessly forsake a devoted and faithful wife,

²² No exact date has been recorded for this piece of work; however, it is believed that it was written between 1630 and 1640, based on the historical evidence available; hence her “court service to Queen Isabel, who reigned from 1621 until her death in 1644” (*Women’s Acts* 2).

²³ No exact date has been recorded for this play; supposedly, it was written between 1630 and 1640, based on the suggestions of historical evidence, as mentioned in the previous note.

Rosimunda, and pursue a religious woman who cannot accommodate his demands. Britaldo's love toward Irene is not her only struggle as a woman of God, and a devoted nun, for there is another character in the plot who, unexpectedly, develops feelings toward Irene; a monk by the name of Remigio. Remigio, who is not only supposed to be a godly man, but one who is the mentor and, in many ways, the protector of his apprentice, becomes enamored with the nun, and therefore, embarks on an amorous quest for her love. As the drama develops and culminates in this serious-toned *comedia*, Irene's deep devotion and dedication to her godly father is revealed to the men who cross her religious pathway.

4. Devotion through Divine Characters

During 17th century Spain, the religion that dominated, and continues to reign in the 21st century, was Catholicism. Due to the extreme actions of the Catholic Church to ensure its longevity during this period, the Spaniards felt compelled to express their positions toward the church. Dramatists, among other authors (poets, novelists, and critics), expressed their locus, which was either an opposition or a positive inclination toward the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Playwrights from the Baroque period had a tendency to exhibit a form of critique or defense of the church in an attempt to express their stance toward the actions of the church; hence, plays were used to express religious beliefs which rested primordially on the popular faith of that period, Catholicism. Devotion to the church, God and the Virgin Mary were most commonly depicted in the divine characters of Ángela de Acevedo's *comedias famosas*²⁴.

In *Dicha y Desdicha del juego de devoción de la Virgen*, the two noble siblings are unable to find suitable partners. This is due to the impoverished social class from which they come. Felisardo and María's father was a compulsive gambler and risk-taker whose engagements led to the demise and downfall of their family name; their mother, on the other hand, was a devout Catholic who shared her convictions with her children. In an attempt to conquer the love of his beloved Violante, a wealthy woman with an obstinate father, Felisardo succumbs to the same deception as his father; hence, he gambles with Don Fadrique, his archenemy, for this wealthy nobleman is also pursuing Violante. There is a dichotomy between the male protagonists and female protagonists because the males are driven by their temptations and consumed by their desires for wealth,

²⁴ Ángela subtitled her works with this heading; hence her *comedias* were sure to be *famosas* (famous).

and ultimately demonstrate a lack of faith. On the other hand, the women share a love for the Virgin Mary and isolate themselves in an absolute state of devotion to their religious beliefs.

The character of Doña María de Acevedo (María) exemplifies the true characteristics that personify a devout Catholic with undying adoration and profound ecclesiastical devotion toward the Virgin Mary. From the opening scene of this character, the reader learns from the voice of her maid-servant, Rosela, that prayer is her incessant commitment:

“MAR. La una ha dado.
 ROS. Y aun estábamos haciendo
 las dos en el oratorio
 oración, que es el empeño continuo de mi señora.
 MAR. Lisonja es para el deseo la devoción de la Virgen.”
 (*Women’s Acts 6*)

After a comedic performance in the middle of the night by Felisardo and his fantasy, which entailed one of the subgenres of classic Spanish theater of the Golden Age, *de capa a espada*, i.e., cloak and dagger or swashbuckling, María alludes to the time of one o’clock in the morning and finds it necessary to pray. Rosela states that although time has transpired and it is late, her lady finds it essential to pray in the oratory because it is a continual activity of hers. Lastly, María responds with “Flattery is to desire devotion toward the Virgin”; therefore, embodying the morality exalted in a divine creature. Furthermore, she is firm in her convictions.

Toward the second part of this *comedia*, María and Rosela are departing from the church when they are approached by Don Fadrique and Tijera (Don Fadrique’s man-servant). Prior to the conversation with the gentlemen, the female characters share the tremendous adulation they partake in for the Virgin Mary:

“MAR. No hay quien apartarse pueda de esta imagen sacrosanta de
 María²⁵
 ROS. Es milagrosa, y por tal muy frecuentada
 y la música, ¿no estuvo
 del rosario, di, aseada?” (*Women’s Acts 15*)

María explains that no one can deviate from the sacred image of Mary, and Rosela alludes to the miraculous nature of this highly sought after

²⁵ In reference to the Virgin Mary.

entity and how rosary music was aligned to the Virgin Mary's design. As the drama unfolds in the first part of this plot, Don Fadrique shares his esteem for María and she responds unfavorably to his courteous and amorous lyrics:

“FAD. No neguéis luces al día,
 señora, que el ser avara,
 si bien os inculca rica,
 también os publica ingrata
 Mirad, que me ha anochecida
 después de ver la mañana
 en el candor de esa estrella
 y de la esa luz en la gracia.
 No se arrepienta la aurora,
 deponga el rebozo el alba,
 para dar alma a las vidas,
 para dar vida a las almas.

MAR. Esas lisonjas, señor,
 procurad mejor gastarlas,
 que con quien no las merece
 se hacen muy poco estimadas.
 Si hacer queréis oración,
 entrad y dejad quien pasa,
 no dejando por curioso
 la cortesía agraviada.” (*Women's Acts 15-16*)

Don Fadrique tells her not to negate her light to the day, and that having a greedy soul is not recommended. María is not pleased with Don Fadrique courting her, and tells him that he should not waste his tantalizing words on someone who does not appreciate them and is merely passing through, but had better use his diction to pray in the church.

It is clear that Doña María is an exemplary woman who respects the norms of her contemporary society and does not disrespect herself or her home by succumbing to an undesirable situation with a complete stranger. Later in the plot, she develops feelings for him, and it is too late, for he has decided to court a wealthier woman, Violante, who is Felisardo's love interest; hence the rivalry of these two male protagonists in the storyline. Instead of reacting in a more secular fashion, María's devotion and divinity come to light as she relies completely on her faith and enters into prayer to alleviate the pain that comes with love and loss; she demonstrates utter devoutness to the Virgin Mary and the power of worship and prayer. It is imperative to mention that there is an established theatrical code used by the author, which is to interiorize the discourse of moral women;

thereby, presenting the true depiction of the divine woman, from the Baroque period, who is devoted to God and the Virgin Mary. In the dramatist's play *Dicha y Desdicha del juego de devoción de la Virgen*, the character that exhibits the greatest and highest devotion and divinity is Doña María, as there are many more aspects of this play which support this ideology.

As suggested earlier in the synopsis of *La margarita de Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*, Acevedo anthropomorphizes a hagiographical drama by centralizing the protagonist's (Irene's) story based on the legend of Saint Irene. Irene, being a devoted nun, has to grapple with the duality of transgression from the main male protagonist in this play; he is not only married to a faithful woman, and is betraying her, but he is yearning for a nun, whom he incidentally met at the church during his wedding with Rosimunda. Once again, we find a moral, devout and, therefore, divine character in Ángela de Acevedo's works. Irene is a direct image of the ideal Catholic woman, with divine intentions and religious ideologies that are aligned with the faith and system of Catholicism.

The spectators of this well-executed drama are not introduced to Irene until line 742, ("Sale Irene con un libro en la mano") in which the protagonist is first presented on stage carrying a bible (*Women's Acts* 53). The imagery that is conveyed with this information reflects a personality that is assuredly allied with religious doctrines. The nun describes the convent as a beautiful paradise where she is in sovereign skies:

"IREN. En esta estancia rica,
 retrato de los cielos soberanos,
 lugar que se dedica
 al candor de los ángeles humanos
 que se juzgan por tales
 los sujetos que pisan sus umbrales,
 en este prado hermoso
 de racionales plantas guarnecido
 que apacible y pomposo,
 contra el tiempo se ve siempre florido." (*Women's Acts* 53)

Irene is describing a place that is dedicated to the candor of the human angels where there is a beautiful meadow of rationally trimmed plants that are calm and pompous; moreover, time is reflected as being "flowery" or colorful. The convent is to Irene the same as paradise in the Bible's Genesis book. The purity, evident in her description of where she resides in faith, lies at the heart of this protagonist, and is indicative of a godlike character.

In the next lines spoken by Irene, the reader discerns the presence of a devout Christian as she prays with a sincere disposition based on urgent need:

“IREN. Mi Dios, por vuestras piedades,
 feliz del alma recurso,
 que a la casa de Britaldo
 acudáis en los disgustos.
 Yo os lo pido, yo os lo ruego,
 y aunque sin mérito alguno,
 de vuestra pasión me valgan,
 Señor²⁶, los méritos muchos.” (*Women’s Acts* 56)

She pleads for God to bring peace to Britaldo’s home, and she even supplicates God to assist her in her wishes, because she is aware that she does not merit her Lord’s kindness, but pleads for his mercy, nonetheless. The diction that Acevedo uses to animate and humanize these characters is truly astonishing; the words that Irene uses are true-to-life in what a scholar would consider authentic verbiage from a 17th century Spanish nun. Although the protagonist physically dies in this drama, the audience witnesses her spiritual body rise through the skies into the Heaven that she so wholeheartedly adulates.

In both plays the reader becomes exceedingly enlightened with the devotional female protagonists and their contribution to the deep-rooted faith of Spain’s dominant religion. Although the storylines are drastically different in context: one play deals with gambling versus faith in the Virgin Mary (*Dicha y Desdicha*) and the second pertains to the forbidden fruit and undying desire versus the convictions of saints (*La margarita de Tajo*), they both explore religion and the downfall of the human spirit when tempted by desires. Moreover, the triumphal soul is undoubtedly the one who exhibits the most loyalty to religion and the system it entails.

5. Indoctrination Typical of the Saints’ Plays

Saints’ plays were particularly prevalent during the period at hand; hence, religion and Catholicism were questioned by the secular and mundane, or upheld by baptized Christians who followed the doctrines of their faith. In his book, *A Companion to Golden Age Theatre*, Jonathan Thacker explores the complexities of religion during the Golden Age, and

²⁶ The author is referring to “Lord” when using the word “Señor.”

embarks on a journey to share with the reader the *comedia de santos*²⁷ and the nature of this type of playwright. Thacker shares the following information:

“Despite the errors of playwrights, however, the *comedia de santos* remained a fixture from the 1590s until the mid-to late eighteenth century when growing moral concerns finally saw its demise along with that of the *auto sacramental*. Works depicting the lives of saints were the most common type of religious play in the Golden Age: their aim was obviously to edify but their content was not by any means monotonously pious” (146).

The research conducted, as well as the accompanying passage shared by Thacker, supports the existence and popularity of playwrights that embodied characters who personified the lives of saints.

In Acevedo’s play *La margarita de Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén* the reader is presented with a hagiographical rendition of a portrayed saint, who is initially presented as a nun, Irene, but later rises to the heavens and becomes a saint. The audience becomes a part of the indoctrination of the writer, as she invites the reader, in a didactic fashion, into the world of Catholicism. The play begins with praise of the convent, and later presents dialogues with God, carefully written by the author to convey the serious devotion of the characters, and later reveals the *contemptus mundi*; a theme typical of the saints’ plays.

In Marie-Francoise Deodat-Kessedjian’s article, the concept of indoctrination through saints in theatrical *comedias* is explored; specifically in the play *La margarita de Tajo*: “Esta comedia de santos de la dramaturga Ángela de Acevedo forma parte de ese conjunto de obras que resaltan la figura de un santo, su vida ejemplar, su muerte prodigiosa...las virtudes de fuerza, humildad, resignación y bondad...” (11)

The reader ascertains the intentions of the dramatist, Acevedo, because her work is indoctrinating her audience to the beliefs enveloped by the saints of the Baroque period, while proselytising the characters in her play as well. As Deodat-Kessedjian contends in her article, the figure of a saint demonstrates an exemplary life and a prodigious death; the saint demonstrated in life the virtues of strength, humility, resignation, and goodness.

The doctrine of Catholicism is inculcated in the different personalities throughout two of Acevedo’s plays (*Dicha y desdicha* and *La margarita*

²⁷ *Comedias* (17th century plays that explored the dramatic [i.e. religious and marital] and comedic themes) of Saints.

de Tajo) and represented in their demeanor and actions; for example, we see how Irene, the main protagonist of *La margarita de Tajo*, courageously exemplifies the doctrine that was bestowed upon her in the convent. In the convent, she has mentors who guide her journey of understanding the Bible and the meaning of being truthfully devoted to God and the Virgin Mary. The following lines (56-65) describe her didactical indoctrination in religion through her education at the convent:

“IREN. escuela donde
 a seguir la razón las voluntades,
 cuya aprobada ciencia
 enseña la virtud de la obediencia;
 lucido firmamento
 adonde las estrellas más brillantes,
 por fijasen asiento,
 firman la dicha en la exención de errantes,
 que no es dicha el ser bella,
 en más no ser errante está la estrella.” (*Women’s Acts* 53)

It is in her school, the convent, where this character is taught about following the correct “will²⁸” and the virtuous importance of obedience²⁹; furthermore, it is in this sky (a metaphor for the mundane world) when these lucid stars (humans) are brightest, in the process of adhering to the proselytization of this religion. In *Dicha y Desdicha*, the Acevedos’ (Felisardo and María) are taught by their mother that religion and faith should always be of utmost importance in their lives; hence, she teaches them about Catholicism and how to be a virtuous Christian.

The dialogues with God are expressed more abundantly in *La margarita de Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*, Acevedo’s *comedia de santos*. The conversations with God by the protagonist initially begin as monologues and later transcend into dialogues. Her first monologue engenders her adoration toward the convent; however, her dialogues with God are answered by the characters of Ángeles (angels from the heavens). The following is a dialogue between Irene and an Ángel (lines 3659-3669) which marks the beginning of the end of the carnal Irene; she is told that it is her time to be with her celestial Husband³⁰, prior to the knowledge of her disgrace, she remains forgiving of those who transgressed against her innocent and godlike traits:

²⁸ The doctrines that are pertinent and aligned with Catholicism.

²⁹ Obedience to the Father God of Christianity.

³⁰ Husband (*Esposo*) refers to the Father God of Christianity.

- “IREN. ¿Remigio? ¡Válgame el cielo!
Dios se lo perdone, amén,
que yo también le perdono.
- ANG. Tiempo es ya de se saber
la verdad, que no es razón
que tan encubierta esté.
Ya llegó el tiempo dichoso
en que tienes que ver
con tu Esposo celestial
a quien has guardado fe.” (*Women’s acts 84*)

The angel reminds her of how she will be reunited with her celestial Husband, the One in whom she has so devotedly maintained faith.

The last theme discussed in this section is that of *contemptus mundi*. *Contemptus mundi* is Latin-based and it literally means “contempt for the world”; however, it is a theme that resonates as a subgenre in Spanish Baroque theatrical works. Due to the vast religious movements of this time period, it was a standard tradition for plays to advocate a disdain for the mundane. This is a theme that is depicted in both of Acevedo’s plays which are analyzed in this work³¹. In *Dicha y Desdicha*, the ramifications of gambling end badly for the Acevedos, and later, when the offspring of the head of this patriarchal unit attempts to follow in the same footsteps, there is great contempt that coexists with his actions. Consequently, the presence of the devil provokes temptations that are disdained for their mundane nature. Fortunately, the Virgin Mary comes to his rescue and overturns the devil’s tactics. Therefore, the readers and characters both learn that *contemptus mundi* is alive and well, and that only by faith can one be free of this condition. The situational context is different in Acevedo’s second play³², for this concept is examined by Irene when she develops a scornful attitude toward those who seek riches through ambitious vanity. Golden Age drama evidently, from a didactic approach, educated its audience about the doctrines of Catholicism through diverse modes of operation, as depicted in this segment.

6. Roles of Women: Wife or Nun?

The roles of women were black and white in 17th century Spain; women were either supposed to get married, rightfully³³ and legally, or

³¹ *Dicha y desdicha and La margarita del Tajo*.

³² *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*.

³³ By the ordained laws of Christianity and the Catholic Church.

enter into a convent where they would then worship their celestial Husband. The following passage eloquently expresses a thorough analysis of both dramas explored in this article:

“...playwright Ángela de Azevedo concentrates on the disastrous situation for all concerned when hegemonical patriarchal essentialism is left unchecked. Her two plays *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen* and *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén* are pessimistic about the possibility of change in the prevailing system. Only supernatural means, they suggest, can rescue the women victimized by a nonegalitarian male hierarchy that allows men, whatever their shortcomings, to control the political, familial, and social dimensions of the portrayed societies” (Scott Soufas, 1997: 72).

The system in place is not egalitarian towards genders; thereby, there are biases that cannot be rebutted due to the patriarchal system that dominates. Furthermore, it is only by biological means that a human being can, legally, reign; henceforward, the preferred gender would have to be male in order to have a say in this society.

In *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen*, the Acevedos lose their position in society because of their family-head, who makes erroneous decisions; the female characters in this family suffer greatly because of the choices rendered by the head of the patriarchal system. Due to the condition of the family, María is barred from entering into the convent: wife not nun? She is eligible to be a wife, but will have to settle for a less respectable groom, with fewer dowries to offer. The decadent noblemen, both father and son, affect the lives of the women around them, with disregard for their opinions and mindsets, for life has always been this way.

The storyline is different in *La margarita de Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*, nonetheless, the situations of the women are the same: wife or nun? Both positions for women are compromised as secular marriage and religious marriage are hindered by men. The two main women in this play, Irene and Rosimunda, are unable to properly become a wife or nun, as the same man, Britaldo, affects their roles as allowed by their contemporary societal norms. Britaldo marries and becomes unfaithful to his wife, and simultaneously falls from the virtue of his nobility and religion by pursuing a nun; thus attempting to take away her religious marriage to her celestial Husband. At the end of this drama, only supernatural means rescue the heroine from the claws of the patriarchal system, for Irene becomes a saint and transcends to the heavens, where she is finally free, and is no longer chained to the mundane conditions of the Baroque period and its societal demands.